

A Science Service Feature

Released upon receipt  
but intended for use  
October 26, 1931

? WHY THE WEATHER ? Mailed October 19, 1931

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CREATURES OF THE SNOW

Snow has a rather extensive flora and fauna apart from the microscopic organisms, of various species, that sometimes cause patches of it to become red or some other color. Many species of insect are found on the snow and ice of glaciers. The most abundant of these are the springtails, which hop like miniature fleas or wriggle deftly into the cavities of the snow, but are so minute that the passer-by needs to look closely for them in order to discover them. Occasionally in their jumps they light in a puddle of water, but this experience does them no harm, as they are thickly clothed in furry scales, which save them from getting wet. Snow-loving springtails are not confined to glaciers. They occur in great numbers on the surface of melting snow, on bright sunny spring days, throughout the northern United States. They are often a nuisance in maple sugar camps on account of getting into the sap.

More conspicuous than the springtails are the "snow worms," sometimes seen in enormous numbers on glaciers and snow fields. Of their occurrence on Mount Rainier, F. E. Matthes writes: "Especially plentiful on the lower parts of the Rainier glaciers are slender dark-brown worms of the genus Mesenchytraeus, about one inch in length. Millions and millions of them may be seen on favorable days in July and August writhing on the surface of the ice, evidently breeding there and feeding on organic matter blown upon the glacier in the form of dust. So essential to their existence is the chill of the ice that they enter several inches and sometimes many feet below the surface on days when the sun is particularly hot, reappearing late in the afternoon."

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